

Secretariat to pick foreign observers

Dr M: We'll get public opinions

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ALOR STAR, Mon. — The foreign observers to be invited for the general election will be picked by the Commonwealth Secretariat, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Government will get the public's views on the move, including the Opposition's, before asking the secretariat to make the arrangements for the observers to be in Malaysia before polling day.

The Prime Minister said they would be given free rein to observe the election campaign throughout the country as well as inspect the electoral rolls.

He said: "Basically, the foreign observers would see to it that the election is conducted fairly and voters are free to exercise their rights."

Dr Mahathir said he would not have anything to do with the selection of the observers or else they would be accused of being biased. Neither would the choice of observers by the Opposition be acceptable for the same reason.

Therefore, he would leave the choice to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Dr Mahathir said the Government did not want Election Watch to help observe the general election because the actions of the panel members showed they were anti-Government.

Members of the panel had gone round the country discrediting the Government, he told reporters at a Hari Raya Aidil Adha "open house" in Titi Gajah, near here.

They cannot be of assistance to the observers from Commonwealth countries because they would only confuse the issue, he said.

Dr Mahathir was commenting on a sta-

tement by Semangat 46 president Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah yesterday that Election Watch be allowed to assist the observers from Commonwealth countries.

Election Watch is headed by former Lord President Tun Suffian Hashim.

Dr Mahathir said that instead of giving excuses, the Opposition should state whether they accepted the presence of foreign observers.

He said it was perplexing that the Opposition had to raise doubts about the foreign polls observers when they readily trusted Election Watch, whose members were known to be anti-Government.

He maintained that unlike Election Watch, the foreign observers would be fair.

Dr Mahathir also said there was no need for Election Watch to be involved in the work of the foreign observers.

"Do they (Opposition) want Election Watch to help in defrauding in the election?" he asked.